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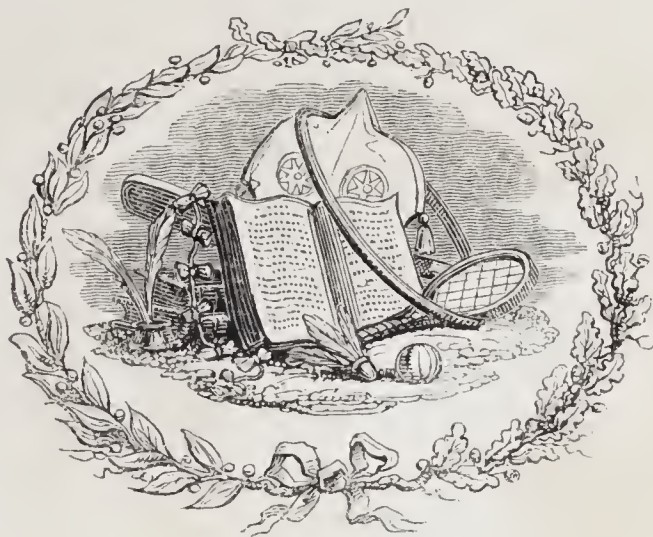
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WILLIAM A. WHITAKER
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T. C. N. Jones

1837




THE
Calendar of Nature:
DESIGNED FOR THE
INSTRUCTION AND ENTERTAINMENT
OF
YOUNG PERSONS.



Delightful task ! to watch with curious eyes
Soft forms of Thought in infant bosoms rise,
Plant with nice hand Reflection's tender root,
And teach the young Ideas how to shoot !

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE PROPRIETOR,
By J. Johnson, Brook Street, Holborn ;
AND SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS,
1822. .



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TO
MRS. AND MISS SHUGBURGH,
PREPARATORY SEMINARY,
PUTNEY;
THE CALENDAR OF NATURE,
IN TOKEN OF GRATEFUL ESTEEM,
FOR THE ATTENTION SHOWN
TO
THE JUVENILE BRANCHES OF MY FAMILY,
ENTRUSTED TO THEIR CARE,
IS
MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,
BY THEIR VERY OBLIGED,
THOMAS GOSDEN.

Jan. 1822.

THE
CALENDAR OF NATURE.

JANUARY.

Stern Winter's icy breath, intensely keen,
Now chills the blood, and withers every green;
Bright shines the azure sky, serenely fair,
Or driving snows obscure the turbid air.

CIVILIZED nations in general now agree to begin reckoning the new year from the first of January. Yet it may seem strange to call that a *new* season, when every thing is most inactive and lifeless; when animals are benumbed by the cold, and vegetables are all dead or withered. For this reason, some have thought it best to begin the year in Spring, when the face of Nature is really *renewed*. But as this happens at different times in different years and climates, it has at length been determined to date the commencement of the year as at present, within a few days after the *Winter-solstice*, or shortest day. This always takes place on the twenty-first of December, and from that time the days are gradually lengthened, till the middle of Summer;

so that the year may properly be said to be now *turned*.

January is the coldest month in this part of the world; and in England we seldom have much frost or snow before it. The weather is commonly either clear dry frost, or fog and snow, with rain now and then intermixed.

Nothing can be more wonderful than the effects of frost. To see the running stream stopped in its course; the lake, that was curled by every breeze, converted into a firm plain; the moist ground dried up and made as hard as rock; and all this done by an invisible power in the space of a single night; would be infinitely surprising to one unaccustomed to the sight. These effects are painted in a very lively manner by THOMSON, in his *Seasons*—

An icy gale, oft shifting, o'er the pool
Breathes a blue film, and in its mid career
Arrests the bickering stream.
Loud rings the frozen earth, and hard reflects
A double noise; while at his evening watch,
The village dog deters the nightly thief;
The heifer lows; the distant water-fall
Swells in the breeze; and with the hasty tread
Of traveller, the hollow-sounding plain
Shakes from afar.

It freezes on,
Till morn, late rising o'er the drooping world,
Lifts her pale eye unjoyous. Then appears
The various labour of the silent night :

Prone from the dripping eave, and dumb cascade,
Whose idle torrents only seem to roar,
The pendant icicle; the frost-work fair,
Where transient hues and fancy'd figures rise;
Wide spouted o'er the hill, the frozen brook,
A livid tract, cold-gleaming on the morn.

Water, when frozen, is *expanded*; that is, takes up more room than before; hence ice is lighter than water, and swims upon it. From this cause, if a bottle full of water, hard corked, be set to freeze, the bottle will be broken, for want of room for the expansion of the water. Water-pipes often burst from the same cause; and hoops fly off from barrels. Nay, even a gun-barrel or a cannon, filled with water, and screwed up at the muzzle, have been burst in an intense frost.

The same property produces a very beneficial effect to the husbandman; for the hard clods of the ploughed fields are loosened and broken to pieces by the swelling of the water within them, when frozen. Hence the earth is crumbled, and prepared for receiving the seed in Spring.

Snow is the water of clouds frozen. On a close examination it is found to be all composed of icy darts or stars. Its whiteness is owing to the small particles into which it is divided. Ice when pounded becomes equally white. Snow is very useful by covering the plants, and protecting them from the severity of the frost; for at a certain depth under the snow, the cold always continues the same. It is

also thought to enrich the ground, and serve as a sort of manure; but some suppose it not at all different from rain in this respect. The beauty of a country all cloathed in a new-fallen snow is very striking—

The cherish'd fields
Put on their Winter-robe of purest white.
'Tis brightness all; save where the new snow melts
Along the mazy current. Low, the woods
Bow their hoar head; and ere the languid sun,
Faint from the west, emits his evening ray,
Earth's universal face, deep hid, and chill,
Is one wild dazzling waste, that buries wide
The works of man.

THOMSON.

Hail-stones are drops of rain suddenly congealed into a hard mass, so as to preserve their figure. These often fall in warmer seasons of the year, as even then the upper regions of the atmosphere are very cold.

Hoar-frost is dew, or mist frozen. It adheres to every object on which it falls, and produces figures of incomparable beauty and elegance. Every twig and blade of grass is beset by it with innumerable glittering pearly drops, or silvery plumage, beyond the skill of any artist to imitate.

Sometimes it happens that a sudden shower of rain falls during a frost, and immediately turns to ice. A remarkable scene is then produced, which the following lines most beautifully describe—

Ere yet the clouds let fall the treasur'd snow,
Or winds begun thro' hazy skies to blow,
At ev'ning a keen eastern breeze arose,
And the descending rain unsullied froze.
Soon as the silent shades of night withdrew,
The ruddy morn disclos'd at once to view
The face of Nature in a rich disguise,
And brighten'd every object to my eyes:
For every shrub, and every blade of grass,
And every pointed thorn seem'd wrought in glass;
In pearls and rubies rich the hawthorns show,
While thro' the ice the crimson berries glow.
The thick-sprung reeds the wat'ry marshes yield,
Seem polish'd lances in a hostile field.
The stag, in limpid currents, with surprize,
Sees crystal branches on his forehead rise.
The spreading oak, the beech, and tow'ring pine
Glaz'd over, in the freezing ether shine.
The frighted birds the rattling branches shun,
That wave and glitter in the distant sun.
When, if a sudden gust of wind arise,
The brittle forest into atoms flies:
The cracking wood beneath the tempest bends,
And in a spangled show'r the prospect ends.

PHILIPS, *Lett. from Copenhagen.*

In such a case, prodigious mischief has been done in the woods, by the breaking down of vast arms of trees, which were overloaded by the weight of the ice encrusting them.

The inclemency of the season is shewn by its effects on animals, particularly on the numerous tribes of birds. As the cold advances, they collect in flocks, quit their retreats, and, rendered bold by want, approach the habitations of man. Larks and various other small birds shelter themselves in the

warm stubble. Sparrows, yellow-hammers, and chaffinches, crowd into the farm-yards, and attend the barn-doors, to pick their scanty fare from the chaff and straw. The red-breast ventures into the house,

————— and pays to trusted man
His annual visit.

Fieldfares and thrushes in large flocks descend from the tops of trees, and frequent the warm manured fields in the neighbourhood of towns. Snipes, woodcocks, wild-ducks, and other water-fowl are forced from the frozen marshes, and obliged to seek their food about the rapid currents of streams which are yet unfrozen. As the cold grows more intense, various kinds of sea-fowl quit the bleak open shores, and come up the rivers, where they offer an unusual prey to the fowler.

The wild quadrupeds, too, are driven from their accustomed remote haunts. Hares enter the gardens to browse on the cultivated vegetables; and, leaving their tracks in the snow, are frequently hunted down, or caught in snares. The hen-roosts are pillaged by foxes, polecats, and other small beasts of prey which our country breeds; but we are happily unacquainted with the ravenous troop of wolves, bears, and other fierce creatures, which, urged by famine at this season, often terrify the villages in the mountainous and woody regions on the continent.

The domestic cattle now require all the care and protection of the farmer. Sheep are often lost in the sudden storms by which the snow is drifted in the hollows, so as to bury them a great depth beneath it. Yet they have been known to survive many days in this situation. Cows with much ado scratch up a few mouthfuls of grass; but for their chief subsistence they must depend upon the hay and other provisions of the farm-yard. Early lambs and calves are kept within doors, and tended with as much care as the farmers own children.

Now, shepherds, to your helpless charge be kind,
Baffle the raging year, and fill their pens
With food at will; lodge them below the storm,
And watch them strict; for from the bellowing east,
In this dire season, oft the whirlwind's wing
Sweeps up the burthen of whole wintry plains
At one wide waft, and o'er the hapless flocks,
Hid in the hollow of two neighbouring hills,
The billowy tempest whelms; 'till upward urg'd,
The valley to a shining mountain swells,
Tipt with a wreath high-curling in the sky.

THOMSON.

The plants at this season are provided by Nature with a kind of Winter-quarters, which secure them from the effects of cold. Those called *herbaceous*, which die down to the root every Autumn, are now safely concealed under ground, preparing their new shoots to burst forth when the earth is softened by Spring. Shrubs and trees, which are exposed to the open air, have all their soft and tender parts closely wrapt up in buds, which by their firmness

resist all the force of frost. If one of these buds be carefully opened, it is found to consist of young leaves rolled together, within which are even all the blossoms in miniature, which are afterwards to adorn the Spring. Some of these are much forwarder than others. The leaves of the woodbine appear just ready to expand by the end of the month; the flowers of the mezezeon and snowdrop seem on the point of blowing; and the catkin, or male flower-bunch of the hazel begins to unfold.

During the severity of the frost, little work can be done out of doors by the husbandman. As soon as it sets in, he takes the opportunity of the hardness of the ground to draw manure to his fields. He lops and cuts timber, and mends thorn hedges. When the roads become smooth from the frozen snow, he takes his team, and carries hay and corn to market, or brings coals for himself and neighbours. The barn resounds with the flail, by the use of which the labourer is enabled to defy the cold weather.

In towns, the poor are pinched for fuel and food, and charity is peculiarly called for at this comfortless time of the year. Many trades are at a stand during the severity of the frost. Rivers and canals being frozen up, watermen and bargemen are without employment. The harbours in this island, however, are never locked up by the ice, as they are for many months in the northern parts of Europe.

The amusements of sliding, skating, and other pastimes on the ice, give life to this dreary season; but our frosts are not continued and steady enough to afford us such a share of these diversions as some other nations enjoy—

Where the Rhine
Branch'd out in many a long canal extends,
From every province swarming, void of care,
Batavia rushes forth; and as they sweep,
On sounding skates, a thousand different ways,
In circling poise, swift as the winds, along
The *then gay* land is maddened all to joy.
Nor less the northern courts, wide o'er the snow,
Pour a new pomp. Eager, on rapid sleds,
Their vigorous youth in bold contention wheel
The long-resounding course. Mean-time, to raise
The manly strife, with highly blooming charms,
Flush'd by the season, Scandinavia's dames,
Or Russia's buxom daughters glow around.

THOMSON.

FEBRUARY.

Now shifting gales with milder influence blow,
Cloud o'er the skies, and melt the falling snow;
The soften'd earth with fertile moisture teems,
And, freed from icy bonds, down rush the swelling streams.

THE earlier part of this month may still be reckoned Winter; though the cold generally begins to abate. The days are now sensibly lengthened; and the sun has power enough gradually to melt away the snow and ice. Sometimes a sudden thaw comes on, with a south wind and rain, which all at once dissolves the snow. Torrents of water then descend from the hills; every little brook and rill is swelled to a large stream; and the ice is swept away with great violence from the rivers—

Muttering, the winds at eve, with blunted point,
Blow hollow blustering from the south. Subdued,
The frost resolves into a trickling thaw.
Spotted the mountains shine, loose sleet descends,
And floods the country round. The rivers swell,
Of bonds impatient. Sudden from the hills,
O'er rocks and woods, in broad brown cataracts,
A thousand snow-fed torrents shoot at once;
And, where they rush, the wide resounding plain
Is left one slimy waste.

THOMSON.

The frost, however, returns for a time; then fresh snow falls, often in great quantities; and thus the

weather alternately changes during most part of this month.

Various signs of returning Spring occur at different times in February. The woodlark, one of the earliest and sweetest songsters, often begins his note at the very entrance of the month. Not long after rooks begin to pair, and geese to lay. The thrush and chaffinch then add to the early music of the groves. Near the close of the month partridges begin to couple, and repair the ravages committed on this devoted species during the Autumn and Winter.

Moles go to work in throwing up their hillocks as soon as the earth is softened. Under some of the largest, a little below the surface of the earth, they make their nests of moss, in which four or five young are found at a time. These animals live on worms, insects, and the roots of plants. They do much mischief in gardens, by loosening and devouring flower roots; but in the fields they seem to do no other damage, than rendering the surface of the ground unequal by their hillocks, which obstruct the scythe in mowing. They are said also to pierce the sides of dams and canals, and let out the water.

Many plants emerge from under ground in February, but few flowers as yet adorn the fields or gardens. Snowdrops generally are fully opened from the beginning of the month, often peeping out from the midst of the snow—

Already now the snowdrop dares appear,
The first pale blossom of th' unripen'd year;
As Flora's breath by some transforming power,
Had chang'd an icicle into a flower.
Its name and hue the scentless plant retains,
And Winter lingers in its icy veins.

MRS. BARBAULD.

The elder-tree discloses its flower-buds. The catkins of the hazel become very conspicuous in the hedges. Young leaves are budding on the gooseberries and currants about the end of the month.

The farmer is impatient to begin his work in the fields as soon as the ground is sufficiently thawed. He plows up his fallows; sows beans and peas, rye, and spring wheat; sets early potatoes; drains his wet land; dresses and repairs hedges, lops trees, and plants those kinds which love a wet soil, as poplars and willows.

MARCH.

Winter still ling'ring on the verge of Spring,
Retires reluctant, and from time to time
Looks back, while at his keen and chilling breath,
Fair Flora sickens.

THE great operations of Nature during this month, seem to be, to dry up the superabundant moisture of February, thereby preventing the roots and seeds from rotting in the earth; and gradually to bring forward the process of evolution in the swelling buds, whilst, at the same time, by the wholesome severity of chilling blasts, they are kept from a premature disclosure, which would expose their tender contents to injury from the yet unsettled season. This effect is beautifully touched upon in a simile of SHAKSPEARE'S—

And like the tyrannous breathings of the north,
Checks all our buds from blowing.

This seeming tyranny, however, is to be regarded as the most useful discipline; and those years generally prove most fruitful, in which the pleasing appearances of Spring are the latest.

The sun has now acquired so much power, that on a clear day we often feel all the genial influence of Spring, though the naked shrubs and trees still give

the landscape the comfortless appearance of Winter. But soft pleasant weather in March is seldom of long duration—

As yet the trembling year is unconfirm'd,
And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,
Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets
Deform the day delightless.

As soon as a few dry days have made the land fit for working, the farmer goes to the plough; and if the fair weather continues, proceeds to sowing oats and barley, though this business is seldom finished till the next month. The importance of a dry season for getting the seed early and favourably into the ground, is expressed in the old proverb,

A bushel of March dust is worth a King's ransom.

The mellow note of the thrush, who sings perched on the naked bough of some lofty tree, is heard from the beginning of the month: at the same time, the ring-dove cooes in the woods. The rookery is now all in motion with the pleasing labour of building and repairing nests; and highly amusing it is to observe the tricks and artifices of the thievish tribe, some to defend, and others to plunder, the materials of their new habitations. These birds are accused of doing much injury to the farmer by plucking up the young corn, and other springing vegetables; but some think this mischief fully repaid by their diligence in picking up the grubs of various insects, which, if suffered to grow to maturity, would occa-

sion much greater damage. For this purpose, they are frequently seen following the plough, or settling in flocks on newly-turned up lands.

Some birds, which took refuge in our temperate climate from the rigour of the northern Winters, now begin to leave us, and return to the countries where they were bred. The red-wing, thrush, fieldfare, and woodcock, are of this kind; and they retire to spend their summer in Norway, Sweden, and other parts of the north.

The gannets, or soland gecse, resort during this month to those Scotch isles, where they breed in such numbers, as to cover almost the whole surface of the ground with their eggs and young.

Frogs, which during Winter lay in a torpid state at the bottom of ponds or ditches, are enlivened by the warmth of Spring, and early in this month rise to the surface of the water in vast numbers. They are at first very timorous, and dive to the bottom with great quickness as one approaches; but in the coupling season they become bolder, and make themselves heard to a great distance by their croaking.

Those most elegant fish, smelts or sparlings, begin to run up the rivers in this month in order to spawn. They are of so tender a nature, that the least mixture of snow-water in the river drives them back to the sea.

But nothing in the animal creation is a more pleasing spectacle, than the sporting of the young lambs, most of which are yeaned this month, and are trusted abroad when the weather is tolerably mild. DYER, in his poem of *the Fleece*, gives a very natural and beautiful description of this circumstance—

Spread around thy tend'rest diligence
In flow'ry spring-time, when the new-dropt lamb,
Tott'ring with weakness by his mother's side,
Feels the fresh world about him; and each thorn,
Hillock, or furrow, trips his feeble feet;
O guard his meek sweet innocence from all
Th' innumerable ills, that rush around his life;
Mark the quick kite, with beak and talons prone,
Circling the skies to snatch him from the plain;
Observe the lurking crows; beware the brake,
There the sly fox the careless minute waits;
Nor trust thy neighbour's dog, nor earth, nor sky:
Thy bosom to a thousand cares divide.
Eurus oft slings his hail; the tardy fields
Pay not their promis'd food; and oft the dam
O'er her weak twins with empty udder mourns,
Or fails to guard, when the bold bird of prey
Alights, and hops in many turns around,
And tires her also turning; to her aid
Be nimble, and the weakest, in thine arms,
Gently convey to the warm cote, and oft,
Between the lark's note and the nightingale's,
His hungry bleating still with tepid milk;
In this soft office may thy-children join,
And charitable habits learn in sport:
Nor yield him to himself, ere vernal airs
Sprinkle thy little croft with daisy flowers.

Another most agreeable token of the arrival of Spring, is that the bees begin to venture out of their

hives about the middle of this month. As their food is the honey-like juice found in the tubes of flowers, their coming abroad is a certain sign that flowers are now to be met with. No creature seems possessed of a greater power of foreseeing the weather; so that their appearance in the morning, may be reckoned a sure token of a fair day.

The gardens are now rendered gay by the crocuses, which adorn the borders with a rich mixture of the brightest yellow and purple. The little shrubs of mezereon are in their beauty. The fields look green with the springing grass, but few wild flowers as yet appear to decorate the ground. Daisies, however, begin to be sprinkled over the dry pastures; and the moist banks of ditches are enlivened with the glossy star-like yellow flowers of pilewort. Towards the end of the month, primroses peep out beneath the hedges; and the most delightfully fragrant of all flowers, the violet, discovers itself by the perfume it imparts to the surrounding air, before the eye has perceived it in its lowly bed. SHAKSPEARE compares an exquisitely sweet strain of music, to the delicious scent of this flower.

O! it came o'er my ear, like the sweet south,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour.

There are several kinds of violets, but the fragrant (both blue and white) is the earliest, thence

called the *March violet*. To these flowers SHAKSPEARE adds the daffodil,

Which comes before the swallow dares, and takes
The winds of March with beauty.

Besides the hazel, the fallow now enlivens the hedges with its catkins full of yellow dust, and the alder-trees are covered with a kind of black bunches, which are the male and female flowers. The leaves of honeysuckles are nearly expanded. In the gardens, the peach and nectarine, the almond, the cherry and aprieot-trees, come into full bud during this month. The gardeners find plenty of employment in pruning trees, digging and manuring beds, and sowing a great variety of seeds, both for the flower and kitchen garden.

In the latter part of this month the *equinox* happens, when day and night are of equal length all over the globe: or rather, when the sun is an equal time above, and below, the horizon. For the morning and evening twilight make apparent day considerably longer than night. This takes place again in September. The first is called the *vernal*, the latter, the *autumnal* equinox. At these times storms and tempests are particularly frequent, whence they have always been the terror of mariners. March winds are boisterous and vehement to a proverb.

APRIL.

Now daisies pied, and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver white,
And cuckow-buds of yellow hue,
Do paint the meadows with delight;
The cuckow now on every tree
Sings cuckoo---cuckoo.

APRIL weather is become a proverbial expression for a mixture of the bright and gloomy. The pleasantness of its sunshiny days, with the delightful view of fresh greens and newly-opened flowers, is unequalled; but they are frequently overcast with clouds, and chilled with rough wintry blasts—

Her face was like an April morn,
Clad in a wintry cloud;

says the beautiful balled of *Margaret's Ghost*.

This month gives the most perfect image of Spring; for its vicissitudes of warm gleams of sunshine, and gentle showers, have the most powerful effects in hastening that universal *springing* of the vegetable tribes, from whence the season generally derives its appellation.

April generally begins with raw unpleasant weather, the influence of the equinoctial storms still in

some degree prevailing. Its opening is thus described in a poem of Mr. WARTON'S:—

Mindful of disaster past,
 And shrinking at the northern blast,
 The sleety storm returning still,
 The morning hoar, the evening chill;
 Reluctant comes the timid Spring.
 Scarce a bee, with airy ring,
 Murmurs the blossom'd boughs around
 That clothe the garden's southern bound:
 Scarce a sickly straggling flower
 Decks the rough castle's rifted tower:
 Scarce the hardy primrose peeps
 From the dark dell's entangled steeps.
 - - - - -
 Fringing the forest's devious edge
 Half rob'd appears the hawthorn hedge;
 Or to the distant eye displays
 Weakly green its budding sprays.

Early in the month, that welcome guest and har-
 binger of Summer, the swallow, returns. The kind
 first seen, is the chimney or house swallow, known
 by its long forked tail, and red breast: At first,
 here and there only one appears, glancing quick by
 us, as if scarcely able to endure the cold.

The swallow, for a moment seen,
 Skims in haste the village green.

But in a few days, their number is much increased,
 and they sport with seeming pleasure in the warm
 sunshine.

And see, my Delia, see o'er yonder stream,
 Where on the sunny bank the lambkins play,
 Alike attracted to th' enlivening gleam,
 The stranger swallows take their wonted way.

JAGO.

As these birds live on insects, their appearance is a certain proof that some of this minute tribe of animals are now got abroad from their Winter retreats.

The birds are now busied in pairing, and building their nests. As their singing is the voice of courtship and conjugal love, the concerts of the groves begin to fill with all their various melody. The nightingale, that most accomplished and enchanting of songsters, is heard soon after the arrival of the swallow. He sings by day as well as by night; but in the day time, his voice is drowned in the multitude of performers; in the evening it is heard alone; whence the poets have always made the song of the nightingale a nocturnal serenade—

Sweet bird, that shunn'st the noise of folly,
 Most musical, most melancholy !
 The chauntress, oft, the woods among
 I woo to hear thy even-song.

MILTON.

Another of the most striking events of this month, is the renewal of the cuckoo's note, which is generally heard about the middle of April. This is so remarkable a circumstance, that it has commanded attention in all countries; and several rustic sayings,

and the names of several plants which flower at this time, are derived from it—

Hail beauteous stranger of the wood,
Attendant on the Spring!
Now heaven repairs thy rural seat,
And woods thy welcome sing.

Soon as the daisy decks the green,
Thy certain voice we hear:
Hast thou a star to guide thy path,
Or mark the rolling year?

Delightful visitant! with thee
I hail the time of flowers,
When heaven is fill'd with music sweet
Of birds among the bowers.

The school-boy wand'ring in the wood
To pull the flowers so gay,
Starts, thy curious voice to hear,
And imitates thy lay.

LOGAN.

The cuckow's arrival is regularly preceded some days by that of the wryneck, a small bird, singular in its attitudes and plumage, and living upon insects which harbour in the bark of trees, which it extracts by means of its long tongue, furnished with a sharp bony tip. The wryneck also has a peculiar note or cry, easily distinguished by those who have once heard it.

Other birds which are seen amongst us only in the warmer months, as the redstart, whitethroat, and yellow wagtail, appear in April.

The fishes are now inspired by the same enlivening influence which acts upon the rest of animated nature; and in consequence, again offer themselves as a prey to the arts of the angler, who returns to his usual haunt—

Beneath a willow, long forsook,
The fisher seeks his custom'd nook;
And bursting thro' the crackling sedge
That crowns the current's cavern'd edge,
He startles from the bordering wood
The bashful wild-duck's early brood.

WARTON.

A considerable number of plants flower in this month; in particular the fruit-bearing trees and shrubs, the flowers of which are peculiarly termed *blossoms*. These form a most agreeable spectacle, as well on account of their beauty, as of the promise they give of future benefits—

Hope waits upon the flowery prime.

It is, however, an anxious time for the possessor, as the fairest prospect of a plentiful increase is so often blighted. SHAKSPEARE draws a pathetic comparison from this circumstance, to paint the delusive nature of human expectations—

This is the state of man; to day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope, to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him,
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost.

And MILTON beautifully uses the same simile:

Abortive as the first-born bloom of Spring,
Nipp'd with the lagging rear of Winter's frost.

The apricots and peaches lead the way in blossoming, and are followed by the cherry and plum. The black-thorn or sloe (which is a species of plum) also enlivens the hedges with its flowers in this month. Those of the lowlier plants which now most strike the eye, are the primrose and wood-sorrel under hedges; the wood anemone in dry woods and thickets; the wood crowfoot and marsh-marygold in wet marshy places; and the lady-smock, or euckow-flower (as some call it) in meadows.

The farmer is still busied in sewing different sorts of grain, and seeds for fodder; for which purpose dry weather is yet suitable; though plentiful showers at due intervals are desirable for feeding the young grass and springing corn.

MAY.

For thee, sweet month, the groves green liv'ries wear;
If not the first, the fairest of the year:
For thee the Graces lead the dancing hours,
And Nature's ready pencil paints the flowers.

MAY has ever been the favourite month of the year in poetical description; but the praises so lavishly bestowed upon it, took their rise from climates more southern than ours. In such, it really unites all the soft beauties of Spring with the radiance of Summer; and has warmth enough to cheer and invogorate, without overpowering. With us, and especially since we have reckoned by the New Style, great part of the month is yet too chill for a perfect enjoyment of the charms of Nature; and frequent injury is done to the flowers and young fruits during its course, by blights and blasting winds. May-day, though still observed as a rural festival, has often little pleasure to bestow but that arising from the name. In a very elegant poem, entitled *The Tears of old May-day*, this newer rival is thus described—

Nor wonder, man, that Nature's bashful face,
And opening charms her rude embraces fear:
Is she not sprung from April's wayward race,
The sickly daughter of th' unripen'd year?

With show'rs and sunshine in her fickle eyes,
 With hollow smiles proclaiming treach'rous peace;
 With blushes, harb'ring in their thin disguise,
 The blasts that riots on the Spring's increase.

The month, however, on the whole, is even in this country sufficiently profuse of beauties. The earth is covered with the freshest green of the grass and young corn, and adorned with numerous flowers opening on every side. The trees put on all their verdure. The hedges are rich in fragrance from the snowy blossoms of the hawthorn; and the orchards display their highest beauty in the delicate blush of the apple blossoms—

From the moist meadow to the wither'd hill,
 Led by the breeze, the vivid verdure runs,
 And swells, and deepens, to the cherish'd eye.
 The hawthorn whitens; and the juicy groves
 Put forth their buds, unfolding by degrees,
 'Till the whole leafy forest stands display'd,
 In full luxuriance. - - - - -
 And the birds sing conceal'd.

THOMSON.

All this scene of beauty and fertility is, however, sometimes dreadfully ravaged by the blights which peculiarly occur in this month. The mischief seems to be done chiefly by innumerable swarms of very small insects, which are brought by the north-east winds—

If, brush'd from Russian wilds, a cutting gale
 Rise not, and scatter from his humid wings
 The clammy mildew? or, dry-blowing, breathe
 Untimely frost; before whose baleful blast

The full-blown Spring thro' all her foliage shrinks,
Joyless and dead, a wide dejected waste.
For oft, engend'red by the hazy north,
Myriads on myriads, insect armies warp
Keen in the poison'd breeze; and wasteful eat
Thro' buds and bark, into the blacken'd core
Their eager way.

THOMSON.

A cold and windy May is, however, accounted favourable to the corn, which, if brought forward by early warm weather, is apt to run into stalk, while its ears remain thin and light.

The first of May is the general time for turning out cattle into the pastures, though frequently then very bare of grass. The milk soon becomes more copious, and of finer quality, from the juices in the young grass; and it is in this month that the making of cheeses is usually begun in the dairies.

The gardens now yield an agreeable, though immature product, in the young gooseberries and currants, which are highly acceptable to our tables, now almost exhausted of their store of preserved fruits.

The leafing of trees is commonly completed in this month. It begins with the aquatic kinds, such as willow, poplar, and alder; and ends with the oak, beech, and ash. These are sometimes very thin of foliage even at the close of May.

Among the numerous wild flowers, none attracts more notice than the cowslip,

Whose bashful flowers
Declining, hide their beauty from the sun,
Nor give their spotted bosoms to the gaze
Of hasty passenger.

On hedge banks, the wild germander, of a fine azure blue, is conspicuous; and the whole surface of meadows is often covered with the yellow crow-foot. These flowers are also called buttercups, and are supposed by some to give the butter its rich yellow tinge at this season; but falsely, as the cows will not touch it, on account of its biting quality.

Birds hatch and rear their young principally during this month. The patience and assiduity of the female during the task of sitting is admirable; as well as the conjugal affection of the male, who sings to his mate, and often supplies her place; and nothing can exceed the paternal tenderness of both, when the young are brought to light.

Towards the end of May, the bee-hives send forth their earlier swarms. These colonies consist of the young progeny, now grown too numerous to remain in their parent habitation, and sufficiently strong and vigorous to provide for themselves. One queen bee is necessary to form each colony, and wherever she flies, they follow. Nature directs them to march in a body in quest of a new settlement, which, if left to

their choice, would generally be some hollow trunk of a tree. But man, who converts the labours and instincts of so many animals to his own use, provides them with a more secure dwelling, and repays himself with their honey. The early swarms are generally the most valuable, as they have time enough to lay in a plentiful store of honey for their subsistence against the Winter.

This month is not a very busy season for the farmer. Some sowing remains to be done in late years; and in forward ones, the weeds which spring up abundantly both in fields and gardens, require to be kept under. The husbandman now looks forward with anxious hope to the reward of his industry—

Be gracious, Heaven! for now laborious man
Has done his part. Ye fostering breezes, blow!
Ye softening dews, ye tender showers, descend!
And temper all, thou world-reviving sun,
Into the perfect year!

THOMSON.

JUNE.

Now genial suns and gentle breezes reign,
And Summer's fairest splendours deck the plain,
Exulting Flora views her new-born rose,
And all the ground with short-liv'd beauty glows.

JUNE is really, in this climate, what the poets represent May to be—the most lovely month of the year. Summer is commenced, and warm weather thoroughly established, yet the heats rarely arise to excess, or interrupt the enjoyment of those pleasures, which the scenes of Nature now afford. The trees are in their fullest dress; and a profusion of the gayest flowers is every where scattered around, which put on all their beauty before they are cut down by the scythe, or withered by the heat.

Soft copious showers are extremely welcome towards the beginning of this month, to forward the growth of the herbage. Such a one is thus described by THOMSON—

Gradual sinks the breeze
Into a perfect calm; that not a breath
Is heard to quiver through the closing woods,
Or rustling turn the many-twinkling leaves
Of aspen tall,

At last
The clouds consign their treasures to the fields;

And lofty shaking on the dimpled pool
Prelusive drops, let all their moisture flow,
In large effusion, o'er the freshened world.
The stealing shower is scarce to patter heard,
By such as wander through the forest walks,
Beneath th' umbrageous multitude of leaves.
But who can hold the shade, while Heaven descends
In universal bounty, shedding herbs,
And fruits, and flowers, on Nature's ample lap?

One of the earliest rural employments of this month is the shearing of the sheep; a business of much importance in various parts of the kingdom, where wool is one of the most valuable products. England has for many ages been famous for its breeds of sheep, which yield wool of various qualities, suited to different branches of the woollen manufactory. The downs of Dorsetshire, and other southern and western counties, feed sheep whose fine short fleeces are employed in making the best broad cloths. The coarser wool of Yorkshire, and the northern counties, is used in the narrow cloths. The large Leicestershire and Lincolnshire sheep are clothed with long thick flakes, proper for the hosier's use: and every other kind is valuable for some particular purpose.

The season for sheep-shearing commences as soon as the warm weather is so far settled, that the sheep may without danger lay aside great part of their clothing. The following tokens are given by DYER in his *Fleece*, to mark out the time—

If verdant elder spreads
Her silver flowers ; if humble daisies yield
To yellow crowfoot and luxuriant grass,
Gay shearing-time approaches.

Before shearing, the sheep undergo the operation of washing, in order to free the wool from the foulness it has contracted.

Upon the brim
Of a clear river, gently drive the flock,
And plunge them one by one into the flood :
Plung'd in the flood, not long the struggler sinks,
With his white flakes, that glisten thro' the tide ;
The sturdy rustic, in the middle wave,
Awaits to seize him rising ; one arm bears
His lifted head above the limpid stream,
While the full clammy fleece the other laves
Around, laborious, with repeated toil ;
And then resigns him to the sunny bank,
Where, bleating loud, he shakes his dripping locks.

DYER.

The shearing itself is conducted with a degree of ceremony and rural dignity, and is a kind of festival, as well as a piece of labour—

At last, of snowy white, the gathered flocks
Are in the wattled pen innumerable press'd.
Head above head : and, rang'd in lusty rows
The shepherds sit, and whet the sounding shears :
The housewife waits to roll her fleecy stores.
With all her gay-drest maids attending round.
One, chief, in gracious dignity enthron'd,
Shines o'er the rest, the pastoral queen, and rays
Her smiles, sweet-beaming, on her shepherd-king.

A simple scene ! yet hence BRITANNIA sees
 Her solid grandeur rise : hence she commands
 Th' exalted stores of every brighter clime,
 The treasures of the sun without his rage.

THOMSON.

A profusion of fragrance now arises from the fields of clover in flower. Of this plant there are the varieties of white and purple. The latter is sometimes called honeysuckle, from the quantity of sweet juice contained in the tube of the flower, whence the bees extract much of their honey.

A still more delicious odour proceeds from the beans in blossom ; of which THOMSON speaks in this rapturous language—

Long let us walk
 Where the breeze blows from yon extended field
 Of blossom'd beans. Arabia cannot boast
 A fuller gale of joy, than, liberal, thence
 Breathes thro' the sense, and takes the ravish'd soul.

Beans and peas belong to a large natural family of plants, called the *papilionaceous*, or butterfly shaped-blossomed, and the *leguminous*, from the pods they bear. Almost all these in our climate afford wholesome food for man or beast. Of some, the seeds alone are used, as of pea and bean ; of some, the entire pod, as of French or kidney-bean ; and of some, the whole plant, as of clover, lucern, and vetch.

In the hedges, the place of the hawthorn is supplied by the flowers of the hip, or dog-rose, the

different hues of which, from a light blush to a deep crimson, form a most elegant variety of colour. Some time after, the woodbine or honey-suckle begins to blow; and this, united with the rose, gives our hedges their highest beauty and fragrance.

The several kinds of corn come into ear and flower during this month; as do likewise numerous species of grass, which, indeed, are all so many lesser kinds of corn; or, rather, corn is only a larger sort of grass. It is peculiar to all this tribe of plants, to have long slender leaves, a jointed stalk, and a flowering head, either in the form of a close spike, like wheat, or a loose bunch, like oats. This head consists of numerous husky flowers, each of which bears a single seed.

In the large kinds, which are usually termed *corn*, these seeds are big enough to be worth separating; and they form the chief article of food of almost all the civilized nations of the world. In Europe, the principal kinds of corn are wheat, rye, barley, and oats. In Asia, rice is most cultivated: in Africa, and the West Indies, maize or Indian corn.

The smaller kinds, called *grasses*, are most valuable for their leaves and stalks, or herbage, which makes the principal food for all domestic cattle. This, cut down and dried, makes *hay*, the Winter provision of cattle in all the temperate and northern climates. Grass is most fit to cut after it is in ear,

but before its seeds are ripened. If it be suffered to grow too long, it will loose all its nutritious juices, and become like the straw of corn. The latter part of June is the beginning of hay-harvest for the southern and middle parts of the kingdom. This is one of the busiest and most agreeable of rural occupations. Both sexes and all ages are engaged in it. The fragrance of the new-mown hay, the gaiety of all-surrounding objects, and the genial warmth of the weather, all conspire to render it a season of pleasure and delight to the beholder. It is at this season that we can peculiarly feel the beauty of these charming lines of MILTON—

As one who long in populous city pent,
Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air,
Forth issuing on a Summer's morn to breathe
Among the pleasant villages and farms
Adjoin'd, from each thing met conceives delight,
The smell of grain, or tedded grass, or kine,
Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound.

On the twenty-first of June happens the *Summer-solstice*, or longest day. At this time, in the most northern parts of the island, there is scarcely any night, the twilight continuing almost from the setting to the rising of the sun; so that it is light enough at midnight to see to read. This season is also properly called *Midsummer*, though, indeed, the greatest heats are not yet arrived; and there is more warm weather after it than before.

The principal season for taking that delicate fish, the mackerel, is in this month.

Currants and gooseberries begin to ripen about the end of June, and prove extremely refreshing as the parching heats advance.

Though the other senses are so much gratified in this month, the ear loses most of its entertainment, as the birds, now the season of courtship and rearing their young is past, no longer exercise their musical powers.

The groves, the fields, the meadows, now no more
With melody resound. 'Tis silence all,
As if the lovely songsters, overwhelm'd
By bounteous Nature's plenty, lay intranc'd
In drowsy lethargy.

After the end of June, an attentive observer heard no birds except the stone curlew (thick-kneed plover of Pennant) whistling late at night; the yellow-hammer, goldfinch; and golden-crested-wren, now and then chirping. The cuckoo's note ceases about this time.

JULY.

Deep to the root
Of vegetation parch'd, the cleaving fields
And slipp'ry lawn an arid hue disclose;
Echo no more returns the cheerful sound
Of sharp'ning scythe; the mower sinking heaps
O'er him the humid hay, with flowers perfum'd.

As January is the coldest, July is the hottest month of the year. The direct influence of the sun, indeed, is continually diminishing after the Summer-solstice; but the earth and air have been so thoroughly heated, that the warmth which they retain more than compensates, for a time, the diminution of solar rays. The effects of this weather upon the face of Nature soon become manifest. All the flowers of the former month soon loose their beauty, shrivel and fall; at the same time their leaves and stalk lose their verdure, and the whole plant hastens to decay. Many plants, however, do not begin to flower till July: these are, particularly, the aromatic; the succulent, or thick-leaved; several of the aquatic; and of those called compound-flowered, in which many florets are collected into one head, as thistle, sowthistle, hawkweed, &c. The lily is one of the principal ornaments of gardens in this month; and with its delicate white flowers, gives an agreeable sensation of coolness to the eye.

The animal creation seem oppressed with langour during this hot season, and either seek the recesses of woods, or resort to pools and streams to cool their bodies, and quench their thirst—

On the grassy bank
Some ruminating lie; while others stand
Half in the flood, and often bending sip
The circling surface. In the middle droops
The strong laborious ox, of honest front,
Which incompos'd he shakes; and from his sides
The troublous insects lashes with his tail,
Returning still.

THOMSON.

The insect tribe, however, are peculiarly active and vigorous in the hottest weather. These minute creatures are for the most part annual, being hatched in the Spring, and dying at the approach of Winter: they have, therefore, no time to lose in indolence, but must make the most of their short existence; especially as their most perfect state continues only during a part of their lives. All insects undergo three changes, in each of which they are transformed to a totally different appearance. From the egg, they first turn into *caterpillars* or *maggots*, when they crawl upon many feet, and are extremely voracious, many kinds of them doing much mischief in the gardens, and sometimes devouring the leaves of the trees, and even the herbage on the ground. This is their state in the Spring. They next become *aurelius* or *chrysalises*, when they resemble an infant closely wrapt in swaddling-clothes; being motionless, taking

no nourishment, and indeed, having no appearance of living creatures. From this state they burst forth into the *perfect insect*, shining in all its colours, furnished with wings, full of activity, capable of propagating its species, and feeding, for the most part, on thin liquid aliments, such as the honey of flowers, and juices of animals. In this state most of them continue but a short time. The male impregnates the female; she lays her eggs; and they both die—

Wak'd by his warmer ray, the reptile young
Come wing'd abroad; by the light air upborn,
Lighter, and full of soul. From every chink,
And secret corner, where they slept away
The Wintry storms; or rising from their tombs,
To higher life; by myriads, forth at once,
Swarming they pour; of all the vary'd hues
Their beauty-beaming parent can disclose.
Ten thousand forms! ten thousand different tribes!
People the blaze. To sunny waters some
By fatal instinct fly; where on the pool
They, sportive, wheel; or, sailing down the stream,
Are snatch'd immediate by the quick-ey'd trout,
Or darting salmon. Thro' the green-wood glade
Some love to stray; there lodg'd, amus'd and fed,
In the fresh leaf. Luxurious, others make
The meads their choice, and visit every flower,
And every latent herb: for the sweet task,
To propagate their kinds, and where to wrap,
In what soft beds, their young yet undisclos'd,
Employs their tender care. Some to the house,
The fold, and dairy, hungry bend their flight;
Sip round the pail, or taste the curdling cheese.

THOMSON.

About the middle of this month, the shoals of that migratory fish, the pilehard, begin to appear off the coast of Cornwall.

The luxury of cooling shades is now peculiarly grateful; and, indeed, is scarcely desired in this climate longer than a few weeks at the height of Summer—

Welcome, ye shades! ye bowery thickets, hail!
Ye lofty pines! ye venerable oaks!
Ye ashes wild, resounding o'er the steep!
Delicious is your shelter to the soul,
As to the hunted hart the sallying spring.

THOMSON.

Bathing, too, is a delightful amusement at this season; and happy is the swimmer, who alone is able to enjoy the full pleasure of this healthful exercise. The power of habit, to improve the natural faculties, is in nothing more apparent than in the art of swimming. Man, without practice, is utterly unable to support himself in the water. In these northern countries, the season for pleasant bathing being short, few in proportion can swim at all; and to those who have acquired the art, it is a laborious and fatiguing exercise. Whereas, in the tropical countries, where from their very infancy, both sexes are continually plunging into the water, they become a sort of amphibious creatures, swimming and diving with the utmost ease, and for hours together, without intermission.

The excessive heats of this period of the year,

cause such an evaporation from the surface of the earth and waters, that after some continuance of dry weather, large heavy clouds are formed, which, at length, let fall their collected liquor in extremely copious showers, which frequently beat down the full-grown corn, and sometimes deluge the country with sudden floods. Thunder and lightning generally accompany these Summer storms. Lightning is a collection of electric fire drawn from the heated air and earth, and accumulated in the clouds, which, at length overcharged, suddenly let go their contents in the form of broad flashes or fiery darts. These are attracted again by the earth, and often intercepted by buildings, trees, and other elevated objects, which are shattered by the shock. Thunder is the noise occasioned by the explosion, and therefore always *follows* the lightning; the sound travelling slower to our ears than the light to our eyes. Just the same thing happens when a gun is fired at a distance. When we hear the thunder, therefore, all danger from that flash of lightning is over; and the thunder, though so awful and tremendous to the ear, is, of itself, entirely harmless.

The effects of the great heat on the human body are agreeably allayed, by the various wholesome fruits which Providence offers at this season for the use of man. Those which are now ripe, are of all the most cooling and refreshing; as currants, gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries, and cherries. These are no less salutary and useful, than the richest products of the warmer climates.

Hens moult, or lose their feathers, during this month. The smaller birds do not moult so early; but all renew their plumage before Winter, when they are in their finest and warmest clothing.

Young partridges are found at this time among the corn.

The farmer's chief employment in July, is getting home the various products of the earth. It is the principal hay-month in the northern parts of the kingdom, and the work people suffer much fatigue from the excessive heat to which they are exposed.

Flax and hemp are pulled in this month. These plants are cultivated in various parts of Europe, more than in England. The stalks of both are full of tough fibres or strings, which, separated and prepared in a particular manner, become fit for spinning into thread. Of flax, linen is made, from the finest cambric, to the coarsest canvas. Hemp is chiefly used for coarse cloth, such as strong sheeting, and sacking; but it is sometimes wrought to considerable fineness; it is also twisted into ropes and cables.

The corn-harvest begins in July in the southern parts of the island; but August is the principal harvest-month for the whole kingdom.

AUGUST.

Fair Plenty now begins her golden reign;
The yellow fields thick-wave with ripened grain;
Joyous the swains renew their sultry toils,
And bear in triumph home the harvest's wealthy spoils.

IN the beginning of this month, the weather is still hot, and unusually calm and fair. What remained to be perfected by the powerful influence of the sun, is daily advancing to maturity. The farmer now sees the principal object of his culture, and the chief source of his riches, waiting only for the hand of the gatherer. Of the several kinds of grain, rye and oats are usually the first ripened; but this varies according to the time of sowing; and some of every species may be seen fit for cutting at the same time.

Every fair day is now of great importance; since when the corn is once ripe, it is liable to continual damage while standing, either from the shedding of the seeds, from the depredations of birds, or from storms. The utmost diligence is therefore used by the careful husbandman to get it in, and labourers are hired from all quarters to hasten the work—

Pour'd from the villages, a numerous train
Now spreads o'er all the fields. In form'd array
The reapers move, nor shrink for heat or toil,

By emulation urg'd. Others dispers'd
Or bind in sheaves, or load or guide the wain
That tinkles as it passes. Far behind,
Old age and infancy with careful hand
Pick up each straggling ear.

This pleasing harvest-scene is beheld in its perfection only in the open-field countries, where the sight can take in at once an uninterrupted extent of land waving with corn, and a multitude of people engaged in the various parts of the labour. It is a prospect equally delightful to the eye and the heart, and which ought to inspire every sentiment of benevolence to our fellow-creatures, and gratitude to our Creator—

Be not too narrow, husbandmen ! but fling
From the full sheaf, with charitable stealth,
The liberal handful. Think, oh ! grateful, think,
How good the God of harvest is to you,
Who pours abundance o'er your flowing fields.

THOMSON.

In a late season, or where favourable opportunities of getting in the harvest have been neglected, the corn on the ground often suffers greatly from heavy storms of wind and rain. It is beaten to the earth ; the seeds are shed, or rotted by the moisture ; or, if the weather continues warm, the corn *grows*, that is, the seeds begin to germinate, and put out shoots. Grain in this state is sweet and moist : it soon spoils on keeping ; and bread made from it is clammy and unwholesome.

Harvest concludes with the field peas and beans, which are suffered to become quite dry and hard before they are cut down. The blackness of the bean pods and stalks is disagreeable to the eye, though the crop is valuable to the farmer. In these countries they are used as food for cattle only, as the nourishment they afford, though strong, is gross and heavy.

The rural festival of *harvest-home* is an extremely natural one, and has been observed in almost all ages and countries. What can more gladden the heart, than to see the long-expected products of the year, which have been the cause of so much anxiety, now safely housed, and beyond the reach of injury?

Inwardly smiling, the proud farmer views
The rising pyramids that grace his yard,
And counts his large increase; his barns are stor'd
And groaning staddles bend beneath their load.

SOMERVILLE.

The poor labourer, too, who has toiled in securing another's wealth, justly expects to partake of the happiness. The jovial harvest supper cheers his heart, and prepares him to begin without murmuring, the labours of another year.

This month is the season of another kind of harvest in some parts of England, which is the *hop-picking*. The hop is a climbing plant, sometimes growing wild in hedges, and cultivated on account of its

use in making malt liquors. They are planted in regular rows, and poles set for them to run upon. When the poles are covered to the top, nothing can make a more elegant appearance than one of these hop-gardens. At the time of gathering, the poles are taken up with the plants clinging to them, and the sealy flowering heads, which is the part used, are carefully picked off. These are a finely-flavoured bitter, which they readily impart to hot water. They improve the taste of beer, and make it keep better. Kent, Sussex, and Worcestershire, are the counties most famous for the growth of hops.

The number of plants in flower is now very sensibly diminished. Those of the former month are running fast to seed, and few new ones succeed. The uncultivated heaths and commons are now, however, in their chief beauty, from the flowers of the different kinds of heath or ling with which they are covered, so as to spread a rich purple hue over the whole ground. Many of the fern tribe now shew the rusty-coloured dots on the back of the leaves, which are their parts of fructification.

Some of the choicest wall-fruits are now coming into season.—

The sunny wall
Presents the downy peach, the shining plum,
The ruddy fragrant nectarine, and dark
Beneath his ample leaf, the luscious fig.

About the middle of August, the largest of the swallow tribe, the swift or long-wing, disappears. As there can yet be no want of insect food, and the weather is still warm, they cannot be supposed to retire to holes or caverns and become torpid for the Winter; and as they are so admirably formed for flight, it can scarcely be doubted that they now migrate to some distant country. Nearly at the same time, rooks no longer pass the nights from home, but roost in their nest-trees.

The red-breast, one of our finest though commonest songsters, renews his music about the end of the month.

SEPTEMBER.

Now softened suns a mellow lustre shed,
The laden orchards glow with tempted red;
On hazel boughs the clusters hang embrown'd,
And with the sportsman's war the new-shorn fields resound.

THIS is, in general, a very agreeable month, the distinguishing softness and serenity of Autumn, with its deep blue skies, prevailing through great part of it. The days are now very sensibly shortened; and the mornings and evenings are chill and damp, though the warmth is still considerable in the middle of the day. This variation of temperature, is one cause why Autumn is an unhealthy time, especially in the warmer climates and in moist situations. Those who are obliged to be abroad early or late in this season, should be guarded by warm clothing against the cold fogs.

In late years, a good deal of corn is abroad, especially in the northern parts of the island, at the beginning of September; but it is supposed that, in general, all will be got in, or at least cut, by this time; for the first of the month is the day, on which it is allowed by law, to begin shooting partridges. These birds make their nests in corn-fields, where they bring up their young, which run after the

parents like chickens. While the corn is standing, they have a safe refuge in it; but after harvest, when the sportsman may freely range over the stubble with his pointers, they are either obliged to take the wing, and offer themselves to the shooter's aim; or are surrounded by nets on the ground, and thus taken in whole coveys—

In his mid-career, the spaniel struck,
 Stiff, by the tainted gale, with open nose,
 Outstretch'd, and finely sensible, *draws* full,
 Fearful and cautious, on the latent prey;
 As in the sun the circling covey bask
 Their varied plumes, and watchful every way
 Thro' the rough stubble turn the secret eye.

THOMSON.

A remarkable product of the earth collected in this month, is *saffron*. This is cultivated in various parts of Europe, but none is superior to that grown in England, chiefly in the counties of Essex and Cambridge. The saffron plant is a species of crocus, which is planted in July, and the flowers gathered in September. The part which alone is used, is the fine branched filaments on the inside of the flower, called the Chives. It is properly an expansion of the female part of fructification, or *pistil*. These are picked off, dried, and pressed together into cakes. They are of a high orange colour, and have a very strong aromatic odour. Saffron is used in medicine as cordial; and its flavour was formerly much esteemed in cookery. It gives a fine deep yellow dye.

Very few other flowers open in this month; and it is to the ripening fruits, that we are chiefly indebted for variegation of colour in the landscape of Nature.

The labours of the husbandman have but a very short intermission; for no sooner is the harvest gathered in, but the fields are again plowed up, and prepared for the Winter corn, rye and wheat, which is sown during this month and the next.

At this time it is proper to straiten the entrance of bee-hives, that wasps and drones may have less opportunity of getting in, and devouring the honey.

Early in September, a harvest of a peculiar kind is offered to the inhabitants of our sea-coasts, in the immense shoals of herrings, which travelling in a prodigious army from the neighbourhood of the arctic circles, after many divisions and sub-divisions, at length appear in the narrow seas which encompass our island. Yarmouth is the principal station, in England, from whence the fishermen proceed in search of this valuable booty.

Towards the end of this month, the chimney or common swallow entirely disappears. There are various opinions concerning the manner in which these birds dispose of themselves during the Winter; some imagining that they all fly away to distant southern regions, where insect-food is at all times to be met with; others, that they retire to holes and eavens,

or even sink to the bottom of ponds and rivers, where they pass the Winter months in a torpid and apparently lifeless state. That many of them migrate to other countries, seems sufficiently proved. But some, probably, always stay behind, which are the younger broods, or smaller kinds, that are incapable of so long a flight. For some time before their departure, they begin to collect in flocks, settling on trees, basking on the roofs of buildings, or gathering round towers and steeples, from whence they take short excursions, as if to try their powers of flight—

When Autumn scatters his departing gleams,
Warn'd of approaching Winter, gathered, play
The swallow-people; and toss'd wide around,
O'er the calm sky, in convulsion swift,
The feathered eddy floats : rejoicing once,
Ere to their Wintry slumbers they retire;
In clusters clung, beneath the mould'ring bank,
And where, unperceiv'd by frost, the cavern sweats.
Or rather into warmer climes convey'd,
With other kindred birds of season, there
They twitter chearful, till the vernal months
Invite them welcome back : for, thronging, now
Innumerable wings are in commotion all.

THOMSON.

Not only the swallow tribe, but many other small birds which feed on insects, disappear on the approach of cold weather, when the insects themselves are no longer to be met with.

On the other hand, some birds arrive at this season from still more northerly countries to spend the

Winter with us. The fieldfare and redwing, whose departure was mentioned in March, return about the end of September. They feed chiefly on the berries with which our woods and hedges are plentifully stored all the Winter.

Those sweet and mellow-toned songsters, the wood-lark, thrush, and blackbird, now begin their Autumnal music.

The most useful fruit this country affords, the apple, successively ripens, according to its different kinds, from July to September or October; but the principal harvest of them is about the close of this month. They are now gathered for our English vintage, the *cyder-making*, which in some counties is a busy and important employment—

Autumn paints

Ausonian hills with grapes, whilst English plains
Blush with pomaceous harvests, breathing sweets.
O let me now, when the kind early dew
Unlocks the embosom'd odours, walk among
The well-rang'd files of trees, whose full-aged store
Diffuse ambrosial streams.

- - - - -
Now, now's the time; ere hasty suns forbid
To work, disburthen thou thy sapless wood
Of its rich progeny; the turgid fruit
Abounds with mellow liquor.

PHILIPS.

The apples are taken either fresh from the tree, or after they have lain awhile to mellow, and crushed in a mill, and then pressed, till all their juice is ex-

tracted. This is set to ferment, whence it becomes *Cyder*, which may properly be called *Apple-wine*. Pears, treated in the same manner, yield a vinous liquor, called *Perry*. These are the common drink in the countics where they are chiefly made.

Another agreeable product both of our thickets and gardens, the¹ hazel-nut, is fit for gathering at this time—

Ye virgins come. For you their latest song
The woodlands raise; the clustering nuts for you
The lover finds amid the secret shade;
And, where they burnish on the topmost bough,
With active vigour crushes down the tree,
Or shakes them ripe from the resigning husk.

The acorns now begin to fall from the oak, and the nuts from the beech; both which have the name of *mast*. These, in countries where there are large forests, afford a plentiful food to swine, which are turned into the woods at this season.

The Autumnal equinox, when day and night is again equal over the whole globe, happens about the twenty-third of September. This, as well as the vernal, is generally attended with storms, which throw down much of the fruit yet remaining on the trees.

By the end of this month, the leaves of many trees have their verdure impaired, and begin to put on their Autumnal colours; which, however, are not complete till the ensuing month.

OCTOBER.

The fading many-colour'd woods,
Shade deep'ning over shade, the country round
Imbrown; a crowded umbrage, dusk and dun,
Of every hue, from wan declining green
To sooty dark.

THE great business of Nature, with respect to the vegetable creation, at this season, is *dissemination*. Plants, having gone through the progressive stages of springing, flowering, and seeding, have at length brought to maturity the rudiments of a future progeny, which are now to be committed to the fostering bosom of the earth. This being done, the parent vegetable, is of the *herbaceous* kind, either totally dies, or perishes as far as it rose above ground: if a *tree* or *shrub*, it loses all its tender parts which the Spring and Summer had put forth. Seeds are scattered by the hand of Nature in various manners. The winds, which at this time arises, disperse far and wide many seeds which are curiously furnished with feathers or wings for this purpose. Hence plants with such seeds are, of all, the most universally to be met with; as dandelion, groundsel, ragwort, thistles, &c. Other seeds, by the means of hooks, lay hold of passing animals, and are thus carried to distant places. The common burs are examples of this contrivance. Many are contained

in berries, which being eaten by birds, the seeds are discharged again, uninjured, and grow where they happen to light. Thus carefully has Nature provided for the distribution and propagation of plants.

The gloom of the falling year is in some measure enlivened, during this month especially, by the variety of colours, some lively and beautiful, put on by the fading leaves of trees and shrubs—

Those virgin leaves, of purest vivid green,
Which charm'd ere yet they trembled on the trees,
Now cheer the sober landscape in decay :
The lime first-fading; and the golden birch,
With bark of silver hue; the moss-grown oak,
Tenacious of its leaves of russet-brown;
Th' ensanguin'd dogwood; and a thousand tints
Which Flora, dress'd in all her pride of bloom,
Could scarcely equal, decorate the groves.

To these temporary colours are added the more durable ones of ripened berries, a variety of which now enrich our hedges. Among these are particularly distinguished the hip, the fruit of the wild rose; the haw, of the hawthorn; the sloe, of the blackthorn; the blackberry, of the bramble; and the berries of the elder, holly, and woody nightshade: These are a providential supply for the birds during the Winter season; and it is said, that they are most plentiful when the ensuing Winter is to be most severe.

The common martin, whose nests, hung under the eaves of our houses, afford so agreeable a spectacle

of parental fondness and assiduity, usually disappears in October. As this, though one of the smallest of the swallow kind, stays the latest, its emigration to distant climates is less probable than that of the others. The sand-martin which breeds in holes in the sandy banks of rivers, and about cliffs and quarries, most probably passes the Winter in a torpid state in those holes.

The royston, or hooded crow, which migrates northwards to breed, returns about the beginning of this month. At the same time the woodcock is first seen on our eastern coasts; though the great body of them does not arrive till November or December. Various kinds of water-fowl, which breed in the northern regions, approach our coasts at this season. About the middle of the month, wild geese quit the fens, and go up to the rye lands, where they pluck the young corn.

The weather about this period is sometimes extremely misty, with a perfect calm. The ground is covered with spiders' webs innumerable, crossing the paths, and extending from one shrub to another—

Now by the cool declining year condens'd,
Descend the copious exhalations, check'd
As up the middle sky unseen they stole,
And roll the doubling fogs around the hill.
- - - - - Thence expanding far,
The huge dust, gradual, swallows up the plain:
Vanish the woods; the dim-seen river seems
Sullen, and slow, to roll the misty wave.

Even in the height of noon opprest, the sun
Sheds weak, and blunt, his wide refracted ray;
Whence glaring oft, with many a broaden'd orb,
He frights the nations. Indistinct on earth,
Seen thro' the turbid air, beyond the life
Objects appear; and wilder'd, o'er the waste
The shepherd stalks gigantic.

THOMSON.

This month is the height of the hunting season. The temperature of the weather is peculiarly favourable to the sport; and as the products of the earth are all got in, little damage is done by the horse-men in pursuing their chace across the fields—

All now is free as air, and the gay pack
In the rough bristly stubbles range umblam'd;
No widow's tears o'erflow, no secret curse
Swells in the farmer's breast, which his pale lips
Trembling conceal, by his fierce landlord aw'd:
But courteous now he levels every fence,
Joins in the common cry, and halloos loud,
Charm'd with the rattling thunder of the field.

SOMERVILLE.

It is usually in October that the bee-hives are despoiled of their honey. As long as flowers are plentiful, the bees continue adding to their store; but when these fail, they are obliged to begin feeding on the honey they have already made. From this time, therefore, the hive grows less and less valuable. Its condition is judged of by its weight. The common method of getting at the honey, is by destroying the bees with the fumes of burning brimstone. The humane THOMSON exclaims against this practise—

Ah see where robb'd, and murder'd, in that pit
Lies the still heaving hive ! at evening snatch'd,
Beneath the cloud of guilt-concealing night,
And fix'd o'er sulphur; while, not dreaming ill,
The happy people, in their waxen cells,
Sat tending public cares, and planning schemes
Of temperance, for Winter poor; rejoice
To mark, full flowing round, their copious stores.
Sudden the dark oppressive steam ascends;
And, us'd to milder scents, the tender race,
By thousands, tumble from their honeyed domes,
Convolv'd, and agonizing in the dust.
And was it then for this you roam'd the Spring,
Intent from flower to flower ! for this you toil'd
Ceaseless the burning Summer-heats away ?
For this in Autumn search'd the blooming waste,
Nor lost one sunny gleam ; for this sad fate ?

This cruel necessity may be prevented by using hives or boxes properly contrived ; or by employing fumes which will stupify but not kill them. In this case, however, enough of the honey must be left for their subsistence during the Winter.

In most of the wine countries of Europe, the *vintage* takes place in October. The grape is one of the latest fruits in ripening. When gathered, they are immediately pressed, and the juice is fermented, like that of apples in making Cyder. A great variety of wines are produced from the different kinds of grapes, and the diversity of climates in which they grow. In England, this fruit does not ripen constantly enough, to be worth cultivation for the purpose of making wine.

This month is particularly chosen, on account of its mild temperature, for the brewing of malt liquor designed for long keeping, which is, therefore, commonly called *old October*.

The farmer continues to sow his Winter corn during this month; and wheat is frequently not all sown till the end of it. When the weather is too wet for this business, he plows up the stubble fields for Winter fallows. Acorns are sown for young plantations at this time; and forest and fruit trees are planted.

At the very close of the month, a few flowers still cheer the eye; and there is a second blow of some kinds, particularly of the woodbine. But the scent of all these late flowers is comparatively faint.

NOVEMBER.

Now the leaf
Incessant rustles from the mournful grove;
Oft startling such as, studious, walk below;
And slowly circles thro' the waving air.

As the preceding month was marked by a *change*, so this is distinguished by the *fall* of the leaf. This last is so striking a circumstance, that the whole declining season of the year is often, in common language, named the *Fall*. There is something extremely melancholy in this gradual process, by which the trees are stripped of all their beauty, and left so many monuments of decay and desolation. The first of poets has deduced from this quick succession of springing and falling leaves, an apt comparison for the fugitive races of men—

Like leaves on trees the race of man is found,
Now green in youth, now withering on the ground.
Another race the following Spring supplies,
They fall successive, and successive rise;
So generations in their course decay,
So flourish these, when those are past away.

POPE'S HOMER.

This loss of verdure, together with the shortened days, the diminishing warmth, and frequent rains, justify the title of the *gloomy month of November*:

and other animals seem to sympathize with man in feeling it as such—

In pensive guise,
Oft let me wander o'er the russet mead,
And thro' the saddened grove, where scarce is heard
One dying strain, to cheer the woodman's toil.
Haply some widowed songster pours his plaint,
Far, in faint warblings, thro' the tawny copse.
While congregated thrushes, linnets, larks,
And each wild throat, whose artless strains so late
Swell'd all the music of the swarming shades,
Robb'd of their tuneful souls, now shivering sit
On the dead tree, a dull despondent flock;
With not a brightness waving o'er their plumes,
And nought save chattering discord in their note.

THOMSON.

Intervals of clear and pleasant weather, however, frequently occur; and, in general, the Autumnal months are, in our island, softer and less variable than the correspondent ones in Spring. It long continues—

The pale descending year, yet pleasing still.

In fair weather, the mornings are somewhat frosty; but the hoar frost or thin ice soon vanishes after sun-rise—

The lengthened night elaps'd, the morning shines
Serene, in all her dewy beauty bright,
Unfolding fair the last Autumnal day.
And now the mounting sun dispels the fog;
The rigid hoar frost melts before his beam;
And hung on every spray, on every blade
Of grass, the myriad dew-drops twinkle round.

THOMSON.

High winds frequently happen in November, which at once strip the trees of their faded leaves, and reduce them to their Winter state of nakedness—

O'er the sky the leafy deluge streams;
Till choak'd and matted with the dreary shower,
The forest-walks, at every rising gale,
Roll wide the wither'd waste, and whistle bleak.

THOMSON.

Flocks of wood-pigeons, or stock-doves, the latest in their arrival of the birds of passage, visit us in this month.

Salmons now begin to ascend the rivers to spawn. Their force and agility in leaping over cataracts and other obstacles to their ascent, are very surprising. They are frequently taken in this attempt, by nets or baskets placed directly below the fall, into which they are carried after an unsuccessful leap.

The farmer strives during this month to finish all his plowing of fallows; and then lays up his utensils till the ensuing year.

Cattle and horses are taken out of the exhausted pastures, and kept in the house or yard. Hogs are put up to fatten. Sheep are turned into the turnip-field, or, in stormy weather, fed with the hay at the rick.

Bees now require to be moved under shelter; and the pigeons in the dove-house to be fed.

DECEMBER.

See, Winter comes, to rule the varied year,
Sullen and sad, with all his rising train?
Vapours, and clouds, and storms.

THE changes which take place in the face of Nature during this month, are little more than so many advances in the progress towards universal gloom and desolation—

No mark of vegetable life is seen,
No bird to bird repeats his tuneful call,
Save the dark leaves of some rude evergreen,
Save the lone red-breast on the moss-grown wall.
SCOTT.

The day now rapidly decreases; the weather becomes foul and cold; and, as SHAKSPEARE expresses it—

The rain and wind beat dark December.

In this climate, however, no great and continued severity of cold usually takes place before the close of the month.

Several of the wild quadrupeds now take to their Winter concealments, which they either seldom or never quit during the Winter. Of these, some are

in an absolutely torpid or sleeping state, taking no food for a considerable time; others are only drowsy and inactive, and continue to feed on provisions which they have hoarded up. In our mild climate, few become entirely torpid. Bats do so, and retire early to caves and holes, where they remain the whole Winter, suspended by the hind feet, and closely wrapped up in the membranes of the fore-feet. As their food is chiefly insects, they can lay up no store for the Winter, and therefore must be starved, did not Nature thus render food unnecessary for them. Dormice also, lie torpid the greatest part of the Winter, though they lay up stores of provision. A warm day sometimes revives them, when they eat a little, but soon relapse into their former condition.

Squirrels, and various kinds of field-mice, provide magazines of food against Winter, but are not known to become torpid. The badger, the hedgehog, and the mole, keep close in their Winter-quarters in the northern regions, and sleep away great part of the season.

The only vegetables which now flourish, are the numerous tribes of mosses, and the *lichens* or liver-worts. The mosses put forth their singular and minute parts of fructification during the Winter months; and offer a most curious spectacle to the botanist, at a time when all the rest of Nature is dead to him. *Lichens* cover the ditch banks, and other neglected spots, with a leather-like substance, which

in some countries serves as food both to men and cattle. The rein-deer lichen is the greatest treasure of the poor Laplanders, who depend upon it for the support of their only species of domestic cattle, during their tedious Winters.

On the twenty-first of December happens the *Winter-solstice*, or shortest day; when the sun is something less than eight hours above the horizon, even in the southern parts of the island. Soon after this, frost and snow generally begin to set in for the rest of Winter.

The farmer has little to do out of doors in the course of this month. His chief attention is bestowed on the feeding and management of his cattle, and various matters of household œconomy.

The festival of Christmas occurs very seasonably to cheer this comfortless period of the year. Great preparations are made for it in the country, and plenty of rustic dainties are provided for its celebration, according to the rites of antient hospitality. Thus the old year steals away scarcely marked, and unlamented; and a new one begins with lengthening days and brighter skies, inspiring fresh hopes and pleasing expectations—

Mysterious round! what skill, what force divine,
Deep felt, in these appear! a simple train,
Yet so delightful mix'd, with such kind art,
Such beauty and beneficence combin'd;
Shade, unperceiv'd, so softening into shade;
And all so forming an harmonious whole;
That, as they still succeed, they ravish still.

THOMSON.

T A B L E
OF THE SUN'S ENTRANCE INTO EACH SIGN OF
THE ZODIAC.

Though the following Table may not be understood astronomically by most of the readers of this book, yet it may be useful as a reference, on account of the frequent allusions of poets and other writers to the subject.

THE SUN ENTERS INTO	
ARIES, or the Ram, γ	March 20.
TAURUS, or the Bull, δ	April 19.
GEMINI, or the Twins, Π	May 21.
CANCER, or the Crab, \mathfrak{D}	June 22.
LEO, or the Lion, Ω	July 23.
VIRGO, or the Virgin, \mathfrak{M}	August 23.
LIBRA, or the Balance, \mathfrak{L}	September 23.
SCORPIO, or the Scorpion, \mathfrak{M}	October 23.
SAGITTARIUS, or the Archer, \mathfrak{A}	November 22.
CAPRICORNUS, or the Wild Goat, \mathfrak{W}	December 22.
AQUARIUS, or the Waterer, \mathfrak{W}	January 19.
PISCES, or the Fishes, \mathfrak{X}	February 18.





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